

Between past and future: an assessment of the transition from conflict to peace in post-genocide Rwanda

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Between Past and Future.
An Assessment of the Transition
from Conflict to Peace in Post-genocide
Rwanda

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Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	4
Zusammenfassung.....	5
1 Background to the Project.....	6
2 Research Objectives and Questions	8
2.1 Analysing Conflict Transformation.....	8
3 The Transition from Conflict to Peace in Rwanda.....	11
3.1 The Unification Discourses of the Government of Rwanda.....	12
3.1.1 Identity, Ethnicity and Citizenship before the Genocide	13
3.1.2 Identity, Ethnicity and Citizenship after the Genocide	13
3.1.3 Power and Closure.....	15
3.2 National Commemorations and Remembering	16
3.2.1 Chosen Trauma.....	16
3.3 Local Discourses and Forgetting	20
3.3.1 Chosen Amnesia	21
3.4 The Transitional Justice Discourse	23
3.4.1 Gacaca Tribunals	23
3.4.2 Truth, Justice and Reconciliation	25
3.5 The Role of the International Development Community in Peacebuilding in Rwanda	27
3.5.1 History of International Donors' Presence.....	28
3.5.2 Governance and Institution-building.....	30
3.5.3 Democratisation in Rwanda	33
4 Conclusions	37
5 Transfer of Findings and Future Research	40
Bibliography	41

Abstract

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 was a prime example for the negative impact of manipulation and propaganda discourses which incited a large section of the Hutu population to kill approximately 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu. The project asked if and how today, more than a decade after the genocide, the antagonistic relationships between the parties to the conflict have changed and whether sustainable peace is possible in the future. The overall object of analysis was thus the process of conflict transformation in Rwanda. Against this backdrop, it analysed the impact of various peacebuilding discourses, leading to two objectives:

Objective 1: Development of a framework for the analysis of conflict transformation

Even though peacebuilding has been central to peace and conflict studies for some time, the question of how the transformation from war to peace can be assessed is rarely ever asked, let alone discussed. The theoretical objective of the project was therefore to develop a framework for the evaluation of conflict transformation processes in post-conflict societies. To this end, the project took a lead from contemporary studies on the construction of enemies in discourse. It analysed if and how enmity can be 'un-constructed', i.e. reduced discursively.

Objective 2: Assessment of the impact of peacebuilding discourses on conflict transformation in Rwanda

In Rwanda in 1994, the impact of enmity discourses and hate speech made it possible for people to murder their own community members and sometimes even relatives. Against this backdrop, it can be assumed that discourses on inclusion, coexistence and reconciliation lead to the opposite effect of transforming the divided society so that sustainable peace becomes a possibility. The project examined to what extent this is the case in post-genocide Rwanda. It analysed various peacebuilding efforts by internal and external agents in order to reveal what discourses about dealing with the past they promote, how these discourses impact on the relationship between Hutu and Tutsi and whether they lead to a long-term transformation of the conflict.

To this end Between Past and Future analysed the unification discourse of the Rwandan government, discourses about national commemorations and remembering, local discourses about the past, the national transitional justice discourse based on the village tribunals *Gacaca* as well as the role of the international community in shaping these processes. It concluded that rather than leading to conflict transformation many of the discourses produce and reproduce the antagonistic relationship, standing in the way of future peace and security. The following shall discuss each of these aspects in turn.

Zusammenfassung

Der ruandische Genozid von 1994 war ein Paradebeispiel für das Wirken von Manipulations- und Propagandadiskursen, die einen großen Teil der zivilen Hutubevölkerung zum Mord an ca. 800.000 Tutsi und moderaten Hutu aufstachelten. Das Forschungsprojekt untersuchte, ob und wie sich heute, über ein Jahrzehnt nach dem Völkermord, die Beziehungen zwischen den Konfliktparteien Hutu und Tutsi verändert haben und inwieweit diese Veränderungen sich als Schritte zur Entfeindung der beiden Volksgruppen erfassen lassen. Untersuchungsgegenstand war demnach der Stand der Friedenskonsolidierung in Ruanda. Zwei Ziele standen im Mittelpunkt des vorliegenden Projektes:

Zielsetzung 1: Entwicklung einer Methode zur Analyse von Konflikttransformation

Obwohl Friedenskonsolidierung seit geraumer Zeit Gegenstand der Friedens- und Konfliktforschung ist, wird die Frage, mit Hilfe welcher Methoden die Transformation vom Krieg zum Frieden erfasst und eingeschätzt werden kann, kaum gestellt, geschweige denn erörtert. Das theoretische Ziel des Projekts war daher, einen Ansatz zur Evaluierung von Konflikttransformationsprozessen unter dem Gesichtspunkt der Friedenskonsolidierung in Nachbürgerkriegsgesellschaften zu entwickeln. Zu diesem Zweck knüpfte das Projekt an vorliegende Studien zur Konstruktion von Feindbildern an. Es untersuchte, inwieweit Feindbilder diskursiv abgebaut und womöglich sogar ins Positive gewendet werden und wie die entsprechenden Transformationsprozesse erfasst werden können.

Zielsetzung 2: Empirische Untersuchung diskursiver Konflikttransformation am Beispiel Ruandas

In Ruanda haben Verfeindungsdiskurse es möglich gemacht, dass Nachbarn ihre Nachbarn und deren Kinder ermordeten. Theoretisch ist davon auszugehen, dass Versöhnungsdiskurse ebenso wirkmächtig sein können wie Verfeindungsdiskurse. Das Projekt untersuchte, wieweit die Verfeindungsdiskurse, die dem Genozid zugrunde lagen, in der Folgezeit in eine Transformation des Konflikts überführt worden sind und welche Wirkung die diskursive Behandlung der Vergangenheit gezeitigt hat. Das Ziel bestand darin herauszufinden, ob und inwieweit die heutigen Diskurse über die Vergangenheit und die Zukunft Ruandas die ursprünglichen Konfliktlinien zwischen Hutu und Tutsi aufbrechen oder reproduzieren. Dies wurde anhand der Praktiken und Projekte einer Reihe von potentiell friedensbildenden Akteuren untersucht.

Between Past and Future analysierte daher den Vereinheitlichungsdiskurs der ruandischen Regierung, Diskurse über nationale Gedenkveranstaltungen und Erinnern, örtliche Diskurse über die Vergangenheit, die nationalen *Transitional Justice* Diskurse über die Dorftribunale *Gacaca* sowie den Einfluss der internationalen Gemeinschaft auf diese Prozesse. Das Projekt zog den Schluss, dass die meisten Diskurse weniger zur Transformation des Konflikts als zu dessen Reproduktion beitragen und somit einem zukünftigen nachhaltigen Frieden im Wege stehen.

1 Background to the Project

The research project 'Between Past and Future. An Assessment of the Transition from Conflict to Peace in Post-genocide Rwanda' was funded by the Deutsche Stiftung Friedensforschung (DSF) and hosted at the Hessische Stiftung Friedens- und Konfliktforschung (HSFK).¹ Beginning in January 2003 and conducted over a period of 28 months, it had a strong focus on fieldwork. All in all, ten months were spent in Rwanda in order to conduct over 150 interviews with national and international experts as well as three months of intensive field research in the districts of Gikongoro and Nyamata, where numerous interviews and group discussions were held. The fieldwork was assisted by two Rwandan students who also interpreted the interviews conducted in Kinyarwanda. Whenever possible, we recorded the interviews and later transcribed and translated them into English. Given the nature of the subject, it was however not always possible to use a dictaphone so that we took extensive notes instead. All interviews were open and unstructured, took between one and two hours, and were led in a conversational style to create some trust between the interviewees and us. Given the community aspect of rural life, interviews were sometimes conducted with individuals but also often with larger groups, at times leading to a vibrant discussion between mostly homogeneous kinfolk.

In addition to random sampling, i.e. walking from one homestead to another, we used the method of purpose sampling by identifying population groups relevant for your research and deliberately seeking them out through snowball or chain sampling. Groups we purposely included were rural survivors, returnees, released prisoners, families of prisoners, representatives of survivor organisations, local authorities such as elders or teachers, memorial site staff, as well as people living in the immediate surroundings of a genocide memorial who were of Hutu ethnicity.²

While the effect of the genocide in the fieldwork areas Gikongoro (Gikongoro district) and Nyamata (Bugesera district) was similarly strong, the locations differ in their historical development and their social composition. Gikongoro is situated in the southwest of the country, bordering the Democratic Republic of Congo, and has always been neglected by Rwandan governments. The district itself was created shortly after independence through attaching areas with a high Tutsi population (around the former royal capital Nyanza) to a highland largely inhabited by Hutu in order to weaken Tutsi influence.³ Due to its remote location, but also deliberate policies, in the early 1990s, the town Gikongoro was fairly small, the district did not have any secondary schools and it was largely neglected by international development projects. Compared to other regions of the country, this remains the case to date. Moreover, agriculture, the main source of livelihood, is difficult due to the hilly topography, and the soil does not yield many products.

According to local population data, before the genocide 17.5% of the population was Tutsi, however with a very unequal geographic distribution.⁴ In the 1960s and in 1973 Gikongoro was the place of serious violence against Tutsi, but there were no major attacks after the October 1990 invasion by the RPF.⁵ In 1994, though, the genocide was very severe and it is estimated that 75% of all Tutsi were killed.⁶

1 I am very grateful to Lothar Brock for his valuable support and advice throughout the project.

2 Even though it is not possible to ask Rwandans what ethnic group they belong to, our interviewees were always quick in indirectly indicating their ethnic belonging.

3 HRW 1999, p. 303.

4 Verpoorten 2005, p. 334.

5 HRW 1999, p. 304.

6 Verpoorten 2005, p. 334.

Our other research location, Nyamata, is situated in Bugesera district south of the capital Kigali. The area is prone to draughts and diseases. In order to reduce their prevalence in the country, after independence the Hutu government forcefully moved Tutsi from different parts of Rwanda to Bugesera - which was considered to be a health risk - turning it into a region with a predominantly Tutsi population. A few decades later, numerous Hutu from the overpopulated northwest of Rwanda were relocated to Bugesera, leading to acute land shortage.⁷

Prior to the genocide, Bugesera was the site of a number of massacres on Tutsi, for instance after a failed attempt of armed exile Tutsi to invade the country in 1963/64, as well as during the RPF invasion in 1992, when about 300 Tutsi were killed. Participation in the latter has been explained by a 'hunger for land' of the relocated Hutu from the northwest.⁸ In 1994, Nyamata, and Bugesera more generally, belonged to the first areas 'liberated' by the RPF. As a consequence, there was an immediate influx of exile-Tutsi from Burundi - even while the genocide was still continuing in other parts of the country - which is noticeable today.

Regarding our field research, the most significant difference between Gikongoro and Nyamata was their social composition: while our random samples led us to mainly Hutu households in Gikongoro, in Nyamata many interviewees were Tutsi, both survivors and returned exiles from Burundi. Despite these differences, the critical similarity between Gikongoro and Nyamata is the severeness of the genocide and we did not notice any major divergences in the responses to our interview questions between the regions.

We further surveyed 21 Kigali-based national and international organisations mandated with contributing to peacebuilding and participated in countless conferences and workshops held by members of the international community, the Government of Rwanda and the National University of Rwanda. Although it was initially envisaged to use participatory research methods to assess the work and impact of local civil peacebuilding projects, the delicate nature of the Rwandan context did not allow its application. Participatory approaches were however used in other contexts, e.g. to assess the government's unity and reconciliation strategy as well as the discourses of the international development community. This included - at times actively - participating in seminars, workshops and other events organised by both groups, as well as accompanying them during field trips, leading long, collegial discussions about dealing with the past and, regarding the latter, getting involved in political lobby work.

7 Pottier 2003, p. 12.

8 Ibid.

2 Research Objectives and Questions

The Rwandan genocide of 1994 was a prime example for the negative impact of manipulation and propaganda discourses which incited a large section of the Hutu population to kill approximately 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu. The project asked if and how today, more than a decade after the genocide, the antagonistic relationships between the parties to the conflict have changed and whether sustainable peace is possible in the future. The overall object of analysis was thus the process of conflict transformation in Rwanda. Against this backdrop, it analysed the impact of various peacebuilding discourses, leading to two objectives:

a) Development of a framework for the analysis of conflict transformation

Even though peacebuilding has been central to peace and conflict studies for some time, the question of how the transformation from war to peace can be assessed is rarely ever asked, let alone discussed. The theoretical objective of the project was therefore to develop a framework for the evaluation of conflict transformation processes in post-conflict societies. To this end, the project took a lead from contemporary studies on the construction of enemies in discourse. It analysed if and how enmity can be 'un-constructed', i.e. reduced discursively. Importantly, though, it was not the objective of the study to develop a particular strategy for conflict transformation, but rather to provide an analytic framework against which to assess existing strategies.

b) Assessment of the impact of peacebuilding discourses on conflict transformation in Rwanda

In Rwanda in 1994, the impact of enmity discourses and hate speech made it possible for people to murder their own community members and sometimes even relatives. Against this backdrop, it can be assumed that discourses on inclusion, coexistence and reconciliation lead to the opposite effect of transforming the divided society so that sustainable peace becomes a possibility. The project examined to what extent this is the case in post-genocide Rwanda. It analysed various peacebuilding efforts by internal and external agents in order to reveal what discourses about dealing with the past they promote, how these discourses impact on the relationship between Hutu and Tutsi and whether they lead to a long-term transformation of the conflict.

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2.1 Analysing Conflict Transformation

Building peace after violent conflicts has become popular amongst internal and external agents alike. Between Past and Future was based on the argument that, in order to be successful, peacebuilding strategies need to lead to the transformation of a violent conflict, i.e. to both an agreement about the issues at stake and a process of long-term social change. This follows from the idea that conflicts do not simply arise over issues, but over

relationships, too. 'Disputes ... typically operate at two levels: the more or less openly negotiated level of political demands and interests, and a deeper level of collective experiences, stances, and attitudes integral to the formation of identity'.⁹ The latter dimension determines the relationship between the parties and is deeply embedded in collective memory and enshrined in social practice.¹⁰ An important role in shaping the interest and relationship aspects of conflicts is played by events in which one or all groups have been the victims of despotic rule, expulsion, military conquest, or some other form of violence.¹¹ After a violent conflict, if peacebuilding measures are confined simply to an apparently 'reasonable' balance of interests the danger remains that the neglected 'deeper dimension' of collective experience, traumas and attitudes will manifest itself as an inexplicable 'irrational' derangement, such as the outbreak of violence.¹²

While, after a violent conflict, the 'balancing of interests' might be easier to evaluate, assessing changes in the relationship between the parties towards the conflict is a difficult task. To respond to this challenge, the study used a discursive approach. The concept 'discourse' refers to text or speech as well as to the totality of socially constructed rules that together constitute a more or less coherent framework for what can be said or done.¹³ In other words, discourses are a system of meaningful practises that form the identity of subjects and social relations.¹⁴ To focus on the discursive construction of identity, in relation to difference, has become increasingly popular in political theory. Due to its relevance for violent conflicts, the debate has been extended to conflict analysis and the 1990s saw a proliferation of literature on how social realities like 'enemies' are created through discourse and language.¹⁵ One important aspect emerging out of these discussions is that these 'realities' are not misperceptions, but part of what constitutes a particular collective identity.¹⁶

While these approaches have been valuable for understanding why people fight, there is so far no literature on using a discursive approach to explore how people transcend their antagonism. Does the promotion of a particular discourse construct a new set of rules for what can be or done that is less hostile than during times of conflict? Does it create a system of meaningful practice that forms less antagonistic identities and social relations? Does it aid in transforming the conflict?

In order to examine the impact of current peacebuilding discourses in Rwanda the research project developed a framework of analysis for the transformation of conflict which is based on the concept of hermeneutics.¹⁷ The significance of hermeneutics lies in its ability to conceptualise two interrelated processes of identity formation: on one the hand, it focuses on how the parties to the conflict interpret the violent past and what hopes and aspirations - or fears and worries - they have for the future, and, on the other, it illustrates how this is linked to the experience of the opposing party to the conflict. In this sense, identities are constituted 'between past and future'.¹⁸ The following analytical questions can be identified:

First, hermeneutics suggests that in order to overcome a conflict, the parties need to change aspects of their identity so that they no longer define their own group in demarca-

9 Ropers 1997, p. 8.

10 Buckley-Zistel 2003, p. 121.

11 Ropers 1997, p. 8.

12 Ibid.

13 Torfing 1999, p. 300.

14 Howarth 2000, p. 3.

15 See for instance Campbell 2005, Coker 1997, Shapiro 1997, Suganami 1997, Wilmer 1998.

16 Weller 2001, p. 49.

17 For a detailed account see Buckley-Zistel 2006.

18 This phrase, which also serves as the title of the project, is borrowed from Hannah Arendt. See Arendt 1977.

tion of the other. Through altering the way the parties see themselves as well as the former enemy, the exclusive structures which gave rise to the conflict are being renegotiated. An assessment of conflict transformation should therefore ask if and how this is happening in a particular war-torn society. How do people explain their own identity group in relation to others?

Secondly, the process of transformation is subject to how communities remember their past as well as how they anticipate their future. Research into transformation processes should therefore take these aspects into account through asking what tales are being told with reference to the beginning and experience of the violent conflict. And how people are envisaging their future.

Thirdly, a transformation process is always susceptible to power hierarchies which determine the outcome. An analysis therefore has to include the evaluation of political, economic and social power relations in both discourse and institutions.

And fourthly, the transformation must not introduce a new sense of closure which eradicates diversity, potentially leading to a new conflict. Questions to be raised are whether the shared meaning developed in the process is homogenising or whether it allows for difference. Is the end of a transformation process to create a collective identity, or are communities able to thrive in their diversity?

These four aspects help to analyse whether particular discourses promoted by peacebuilding efforts reduce or reproduce the antagonistic relations between the parties to the conflict. As for Rwanda, the question was hence, what projects are being conducted to build peace, what discourses they invoke and if and how they lead to a transformation of the relationship between the parties towards the conflict.

3 The Transition from Conflict to Peace in Rwanda

In many ways, the Rwandan genocide remains an unprecedented example of violence and terror at the end of the 20th century. On 7th April 1994, after the attack on the aircraft carrying the Hutu president Juvénal Habyarimana, a well-prepared killing machine moved into action in an attempt to extinguish all Tutsi. Within merely 100 days, about 800 000 Tutsi, as well as a significant number of Hutu political opponents, were assassinated by Hutu militias, government troops and their Hutu community members.



Genocide Memorial in Natamara, Nyamata (2003)

Although tragic, the Rwandan genocide did not happen in a vacuum, but in the midst of a democratisation process, following a four-year-long insurgency by the Tutsi-led Rwanda Patriotic Front/Army (RPF/A) of General Paul Kagame, now President of Rwanda. Sparked by the insurgency and the subsequent pressure of the international community to share power and to allow democratic multi-party elections, Habyarimana's people incited nationwide violence and hate through spreading the fear of a Tutsi victory and the ensuing suppression of all Hutu. Given the history of the country, as shall be illustrated below, these hate discourses soon fell on fertile ground, leading even family members to turn against each other.

If the Rwandan society was divided at the beginning of the genocide, the experience of bloodshed and terror, which affected everybody, deepened the gap. In today's post-genocide environment it is therefore necessary to address the social divisions through changing the way Rwandans relate to each other. Failing this, the groups may be receptive to renewed manipulation and instigation of violence by political entrepreneurs. The project therefore examined a number of peacebuilding efforts and their discourses to assess whether they contribute to social change. Crucially, even though it was initially envisaged

to analyse civil society projects, in the course of the fieldwork it transpired that Rwanda is marked by their absence. Within ten months of fieldwork we only identified a small number of projects that directly addressed the antagonistic relationship between Hutu and Tutsi.¹⁹ To discuss the causes for this absence would extend the scope of this report. Suffice it to say that a combination of government coercion on civil society and the lack of temporal distance, funding and freedom of speech have so far prevented such projects from emerging. Instead of civil projects, *Between Past and Future* focused on the government's unification discourse, discourses on national commemorations and remembering, transitional justice discourses and the peacebuilding discourse of international donors.

3.1 The Unification Discourses of the Government of Rwanda

The government's strategy of conflict transformation is based on the promotion of a national unity discourse, i.e. a top-down effort to turn the divided society into one collective identity.²⁰ Creating a national identity - in particular via the notion of an all inclusive political identity, i.e. citizenship - can be a vehicle for overcoming cleavages which have led to violent conflict in the past. This is done by re-shaping the identity of the parties to the conflict through referring to a common past and future and it takes place, *inter alia*, at the level of national commemorations, the re-writing of history and its teaching, as well as through museums and memorials.²¹

After its victory, the RPF-led government launched a project of 'national unity' and established a National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) which has as its stated objectives to promote unity and reconciliation, to fight divisionism and to embark on a project of civic education in order to bring the divided society together.²² The government has opted for a discourse of national unity which is based on Rwandan citizenship, effectively seeking to change ethnic into civic identity. In the words of the Minister for Good Governance:

In the social-political Arena, there is still need to have policies, processes and programs that can create a citizen that is above sectarianism (AMACAKUBIRI). The historical process the Rwandan has passed through has created sectarian conditioned *Munyarwanda* with all the exclusion mentality that goes with it. Such conditioning can not form a basis for the synergetic relationship that is required for social advancement. Thinkers and writers, media, folklore and governance practices must be aligned to contribute to the process of emancipation. A new culture of national identity must be forged and nurtured.²³

19 After careful deliberation, it was decided not to analyse their discourses and impact since it was felt that the research could be too intrusive and damage the newly developed ties. For a discussion of ethical dilemmas during fieldwork after violent conflicts see Buckley-Zistel 2007b.

20 The following argument has been developed in greater detail in Buckley-Zistel 2006. The analysis is predominately based on government publications, public statements, government-run newspapers, interviews with government officials, conference contributions of government officials as well as participation in government workshops and seminars.

21 See for instance Anderson 1991, Hobsbawm 1983.

22 NURC 2000. To set up a national reconciliation commission was already an aspect of the Arusha Peace Accord of 1993.

23 Musoni 2003.

3.1.1 Identity, Ethnicity and Citizenship before the Genocide

The government's effort to forge a new collective identity is founded in its interpretation of the causes for conflict between Hutu and Tutsi, which is based on the social-constructivist view that ethnicity has been invented by colonialism.²⁴ Colonial anthropologists introduced the now-discredited 'Hamitic hypothesis', arguing that Tutsi originate from Ethiopia while Hutu belong to the Bantu people and constitute the indigenous population of the country. During colonialism, this interpretation of Rwanda's past was first adopted by Rwandan scholars such as Alexis Kagame and then by large parts of the population.²⁵

Moreover, Tutsi, who constitute Rwanda's monarchy and who, according to the colonialists, bore a physical resemblance to Europeans, were inculcated by the colonialists with notions of superiority and used as vehicles for indirect rule, while Hutu were identified as common farmers and subsequently suppressed. When independence approached, the feeling of inferiority and resentment against Tutsi grew amongst Hutu leading to the so-called 'Social Revolution' of 1959 which marked the end of royal Tutsi supremacy and the first pogrom against Tutsi. Many Tutsi fled to neighbouring countries and overseas. After independence in 1962, ethnic differences were successfully manipulated for political ends by various heads of state, most notably under the presidency of Grégoire Kayibanda (1962-1973) as well as in the lead-up to the genocide 1990-1994 under Juvénal Habyarimana (1973-1994). Central to the discrimination of Tutsi was the allegation that they were alien to Rwanda, rendering them foreign occupants and challenging their rights as citizens.²⁶ 'The Hamit infiltration of the Bantu country',²⁷ as it was put at the time, i.e. the portrayal of Tutsi as immigrants, led to the equation of citizenship not with residency, but ethnicity. Hutu and Twa (the third ethnic group in Rwanda) saw themselves as the indigenous population and therefore the true bearers of citizenship rights. Citizenship became exclusively defined through (ethnic) identity and a sense of closure was introduced about who was inside and who was outside the nation. This was for instance a core argument of Kayibanda who stated in 1959:

Our movement aims at the Hutu group. It has been offended, humiliated and despised by the Tutsi invader. We must illuminate the mass. We are here to return the country to its owners. It is the country of the Bahutus.²⁸

The notion of returning the country to its owners was taken to an extreme in the course of the genocide when Tutsi bodies were thrown into the Nyabarongo River so they could float back north to their 'native' Ethiopia.

3.1.2 Identity, Ethnicity and Citizenship after the Genocide

In an effort to undo the negative impact of this divisive interpretation of the country's past, the government has embarked on a project of re-writing the nation's history. In contrast to

24 Uvin 2001a. For a discussion of at times competing interpretations of the causes of the genocide see also Kimonyo 2000.

25 Kagame 1972.

26 See also Mamdani 2001.

27 Lacger 1959, p. 57.

28 Enry 1994, p. 58. Present author's translation.



Catalogue of the Genocide Museum, Kigali Memorial Centre (2004)

the above accounts it argues that, prior to colonialism, Rwanda was not divided into different ethnic groups, but that unity prevailed, effectively rendering colonial anthropology and indirect rule solely responsible for the division and hence the genocide.²⁹

In the government's unification discourse, the portrayal of Tutsi as immigrants is replaced by socio-economic differences.

In the words of NURC:

Ethnic groups, Hutu, Tutsi and Twa characterised wealth or poverty; they were not based on blood. One could shift from being a Twa or a Hutu and become a Tutsi if he got rich, if he became poor while he was a Tutsi he was called a Hutu or Twa.³⁰

Through replacing ethnicity with class the government is attempting to de-ethnicise the nation. Citizenship is no longer based on ethnic, but on civic identity, i.e. unity under the name of 'Rwandanness' (Rwandité) and all mentioning of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa is prohibited or labelled 'divisionist'. Against the backdrop of the devastating impact of discourses equating ethnic with civic identity which divided people, the policy of the government to use the opposite strategy to bring people together seems logical. As argued by the Secretary General of the NURC, to focus on similarities carries the promise of sustainable peace.³¹

Not only the government is interested in re-writing history, though, but there is also a fierce debate within society about the right interpretation of the past. To illustrate this struggle, in

²⁹ See also Eltringham 2004, Longman/Rutagengwa 2004, Pottier 2003.

³⁰ NURC 2000, p. 19.

³¹ Interview with Fatoum Ndanigwa, Secretary General of the NURC, Kigali, 1.12.2003.

1998 a conference was held at the National University in Butare, provocatively entitled: '*Changements politiques survenues en 1959. Oui ou non, y avait-il une révolution?*' ['The Political changes of 1959. Was there a revolution or not?']. Crucially, at the centre of the debate about the right version lies the question of responsibility for the genocide. It is argued that if, before and during colonialism, Tutsi were indeed the superior race, suppressing Hutu, then the Hutu Social Revolution of 1959 was just and justified, and by implication the Hutu self-defence against a new inversion of 'oppressive' Tutsi in form of the RPF/A insurgency in the early nineties. If, however, there was equality and unity between Hutu and Tutsi prior to the arrival of colonialists, both the Social Revolution and the 'defence' against Tutsi in 1994 were the plot of a few Hutu in order to gain or maintain political power. In this context, the government's unification discourse is not simply a mechanism to bring the divided country together, it is also highly political since it aims at legitimising its power. Whoever has the final word in this debate controls not only the past, but also the future.

3.1.3 Power and Closure

To return to the hermeneutic framework of analysis introduced above, it is striking that its first aspect, the transformation of identity groups so that they no longer define themselves in opposition to each other, is also a central concern for the Government of Rwanda. It also acknowledges that this process is closely related to the interpretation of the past, in form of the genocide and its historical preconditions, leading to the promotion of an apparently unifying discourse.

The government's strategy provides significant insights into the relationship between identity, memory, power and closure. For regardless of what interpretation of history is correct, the manner in which the government implements and promotes its discourse is highly problematic. Even though there is no official history curriculum, the government uses civic education projects to spread the message about the pre-colonial unity of Hutu and Tutsi, and the future unity of the country, in radio broadcasts, public speeches, songs and *Ingandos*; i.e. through top-down processes and campaigns.³² The message is clear: Rwandans have to unite. That this strategy is a form of propaganda and bears similarities to the hate discourses which led to the genocide is willingly admitted by government officials who add that while inciting violence against Tutsi was bad brainwashing, their own effort in shaping discourses is good and thus legitimate. The mechanisms, though, remain the same. Moreover, the government prohibits any interpretation of the country's past and social composition that conflicts with its own discourse. This is enshrined in a law against divisionism and supervised by NURC. Apart from infringing on freedom of speech in general the law has been used to silence the opposition and to manufacture consent. This has, for instance, been central to a parliamentary investigation into genocide ideology involving a number of critical international and national organisations accused of spreading genocide ideology and divisionism, essentially using the promotion of unity as a tool to silence critical voices.³³ But the use of the government's power to introduce closure on alternative interpretations of the past and a plural understanding of ethnic belonging bears the danger of

32 *Ingandos* are 'solidarity camps' which are mandatory to attend for students, released prisoners and returnees from the diaspora.

33 Ad hoc Parliament Commission on Genocide Ideology 2004.

new antagonism and resentment since differences are being eradicated and legitimate grievances silenced.

Moreover, it has been argued that the government's promotion of an all-Rwandan identity serves to mask the monopoly of Tutsi military and political power.³⁴ Contrary to the previous Hutu-dominated regimes, which assimilated the ethnic and political majority and excluded Tutsi, the RPF-controlled regime founds its legitimacy on an anti-ethnic project of national restoration and a radically transformed founding discourse which only works to cover-up the predominance of Tutsi in all domains of society.³⁵ In this sense, its unity discourse serves the political function of maintaining power.

3.2 National Commemorations and Remembering

3.2.1 Chosen Trauma

After having analysed the national unification policy the study investigated how individual groups interpret the genocide and its prelude and how these interpretations effect the constitution of their group identity in relation to the other group.³⁶ In a similar context, Vamik Volkan introduces the notion chosen trauma which occurs when a group, after the experience of a painful event, feels helpless and victimised by another group. He argues that the group draws the mental representations or emotional meanings of the traumatic event into its very identity, which is then passed on as emotional and symbolic meaning to the next generation. For each generation, 'the description of the actual event is modified; what remains is its role in [...] the group identity.'³⁷ In this sense, chosen trauma is produced by and at the same time is productive of a collective identity. The repetition of narratives about the traumatic event constructs the group's identity in opposition to the identity of the opponent who caused the trauma. In Rwanda, this manifests itself in the way the different groups remember the genocide.

Each year in early April, Rwanda remembers the beginning of the genocide with a national commemoration week, including public events at memorial sites, re-burials, media broadcasts and conferences.³⁸ According to the national commemoration discourse, Tutsi are the clear victims of the genocide while Hutu, and some analysts argue all Hutu, are perpetrators.³⁹ There is, moreover, a national duty to remember and rumours about mandatory participation in commemorations abound. On a general note, national commemorations are profoundly political since they silence contrary interpretations of the past; they introduce a sense of closure to the past which does not allow for re-interpreting an event.⁴⁰ In Rwanda, however, despite the government's commemoration discourse, the past of the genocide is still very alive and vibrant for it is subject to constant, albeit informal and private, debates over interpretations of the events as well as their representation in form of memorials. The following provides what can only be a very generalised account of the

34 Reyntjens 2004, p. 187.

35 Brauman et al. 2000, p. 151.

36 For a more detailed discussion see Buckley-Zistel 2004, Buckley-Zistel 2006, Buckley-Zistel 2007b, forthcoming.

37 Volkan 1991, p. 26.

38 For a discussion of the various commemoration events see Brandstetter 2005, Vidal 2004.

39 Eltringham 2004.

40 Middleton/Edwards 1990, p. 8.



National Commemorations, 10th Anniversary of the Genocide, Amahoro Stadium, Kigali (7.4.2004)

attitudes towards national commemorations and remembering of some of the different identity groups.

For the surviving Tutsi, the genocide not only exterminated their loved ones, but it also destroyed their property and many women were infected with AIDS following the use of rape as a strategic weapon.⁴¹ Today, many struggle hard to make ends meet and some of the victims of the genocide belong to the poorest people in the country. A large number of the rural impoverished survivors feel neglected by the government; their call for compensation has so far been ignored, for financial and political reasons, and the traumatic experience of the past leads to a negative attitude towards justice and reconciliation.⁴² Since living with the experience of violence is central to their identity, commemorating the genocide is of major significance and each year large groups of survivors gather at the numerous memorial sites for prayers.

To them [t]o remember is very important. No one has to forget because it will give youth an idea of what happened in Rwanda. If we don't forget, the genocide can never happen again. (Elderly, male survivor, Nyamata)

It was striking in our interviews how important remembrance was for the survivors and how much their choice of trauma constituted their collective identity. Regarding the national commemoration week, however, many survivors expressed reservations: given their marginalisation for the large part of the year they are offended by the national event and feel their grievances, so deep and personal, are being used by the government for political ends, in particular to once more demonstrate the culpability of the international community for not intervening in the massacres.⁴³ In addition, many of the commemoration events and

41 See for instance African Rights 2004, AVEGA 1999.

42 For the latter point see Longman et al. 2004, p. 611.

43 See also Brandstetter 2005.

exhibitions reflect less the concerns and ideas of survivors than those of an international audience.⁴⁴ Consequently, many actual victims of the genocide feel the national commemorations have little to do with them and prefer to grieve privately in small circles.

Yet not only survivors question the rationale of the national commemorations, but many Hutu, too. With the genocide being a prime example of mass participation about 120,000 *génocidaires*, predominately Hutu, were imprisoned some of which have been released in recent years after confessing their crimes. Since the Rwandan justice system is severely overstretched, and the much expected village tribunals *Gacaca* have only recently commenced their work, most inmates do not have much hope for a fair trial in the near future. At home, having a family member in prison is a heavy burden for an impoverished Rwandan household and many Hutu wives struggle, and often fail, to simultaneously support the prisoners, cultivate the land and care for the children. Consequently, many of the accused and their dependants feel that they, too, are victims of the insurgency and the genocide. Moreover, many Hutu died after the genocide in refugee camps in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in the overcrowded prisons or at the hands of the post-genocide government army RPA.⁴⁵ Having lost husbands, parents or siblings many Hutu do not understand why they are not allowed to mourn their dead publicly and why they are not included in the national commemoration ceremonies, as expressed in the following comments:

To remember is good, but it should be inclusive. For instance, my parents have been killed during the genocide. But when they [the public] remember they remember only Tutsi, so I am frustrated because they don't remember my family. (Young, rural woman, Nyamata)

It is important not to forget the past so that we can prevent the future. But the bad was not only the genocide but also the Hutu who died in the Democratic Republic of Congo of diseases, and also those who were killed in revenge when they came back. Nobody has won this war; everybody has lost at least one family member. (Elderly man, Ntamara, Nyamata)

These quotes indicate the contestation of the exclusive ownership of victimhood by the Tutsi survivors. For many Hutu, too, trauma plays a role in the constitution of their collective identity. Importantly, though, Rwanda's society is not simply split into Hutu and Tutsi, or victims and perpetrators, but, like all societies, it has many vibrant and dynamic groups.⁴⁶

This includes people who were not present during the genocide and who are often generally sympathetic to the commemorations, but see them as a rupture in their daily lives. In particular, many Tutsi and their descendents who fled into exile during the 1959 'Social Revolution' - so called 'old-case-load refugees' - and who returned after the genocide full of hope to the 'promised land' prefer forgetting over remembering. The annual reviving of horrific memories frequently raises mistrust amongst colleagues and friends, and is regarded as a recurring disruption of their efforts to build a new country. Instead, many prefer introducing a form of closure through putting the past to rest and looking forward to a positive future.

To return to the framework of analysis introduced above, the way the genocide is remembered through the national commemorations maintains a rather clear delineation of the various identity groups in Rwanda. The particular choice of trauma delineates 'us' from 'them'. It reveals a dialectic relationship between memory and identity: memory is

44 Buckley-Zistel 2004.

45 Human Rights Watch estimates between 25,00 to 45,000 fatalities. de Forge 1999.

46 For a more comprehensive overview see Hofmeier 2003.



Genocide Graves (2003)

produced by as well as productive of collective identities.⁴⁷ In Rwanda, the particular version of memory derives from the group's self-perception which at the same time reinforces it. This self-perception is often in contrast to the national commemoration discourse, which is thus potentially less unifying than an obstacle to the conflict transformation process.

The study thus concluded that how people remember the genocide, what trauma they choose and what demands they derive from this memory differs widely and reflects and reproduces the tensions prevailing in contemporary Rwandan society. Crucially, though, due to the government's unification discourse, disagreement about the current versions of remembrance cannot be articulated publicly which stands in the way of a frank and open dialogue between all parties. As illustrated above, the government introduced a sense of closure on conflicting interpretations of the past which prohibits all mentioning of ethnicity, undermining group specific remembrance. Articulating the difference on memory, however, would be the first requirement to recall a memory of the genocide and its causes in which all parties can recognise themselves and which could promote the transformation of the conflict. The exchange of different interpretations of the past could lead to a process of narrative mediation in which the parties realise and acknowledge various forms of guilt and responsibility.⁴⁸

47 Antze/Lambek 1996, p. xviii.

48 For a comparison of Germany and Rwanda in this regard see Buckley-Zistel 2005b.

3.3 Local Discourses and Forgetting

While the previous sections illustrated the findings about the top-down, government discourse on unification and commemoration, the following summarises how people deal with the past at a micro, societal level. In this context, it is important to acknowledge that if memory has a unifying potential, so has forgetting.⁴⁹ Whole societies may choose to forget uncomfortable knowledge and turn it into 'open secrets', which are known by all, and knowingly not known.⁵⁰ Through 'forgetting' a whole society separates itself from its discreditable past either at an organised, official and conscious level - the deliberate cover-up or the rewriting of history as attempted by the Rwandan government and outlined above - or through a form of cultural slippage that occurs when information disappears.⁵¹



Fieldwork in Gikongoro (2004)

In Rwanda, during fieldwork in the local districts Nyamata and Gikongoro, it became apparent that even though the memory of the genocide as such was essential for all interviewees, a clearer picture of the causes of the genocide and previous social cleavages had disappeared into 'forgetting'. Two versions of the past can be identified: no memory and elite responsibility.

49 Nora 1993, p. 11. See also Renan 1990.

50 Cohen 2001, p. 138.

51 Cohen 1995, p. 13.

No memory:

You know, we did not know how it came. We were friends, the same people, sharing everything. We are innocent in this situation. (Elderly, male farmer, Nyamata)

According to me, I cannot determine who is responsible for the genocide. We heard that people were being killed without knowing who planned it. (Young rural woman with husband in prison, Nyamata)

Elite responsibility:

We cannot know. It was because of the bad leadership, otherwise we were living in a good climate. (Elderly, male released prisoner, Nyamata rural)

We saw genocide approaching. It was planned by intellectuals. We were innocent and surprised. (Elderly, male relative of released prisoner, Nyamata rural)

It was bad governance. Authorities create divisions among Rwandans, that Tutsi and Hutu are different. Also, it was because of selfishness. Before 1990 ethnicities were living together, sharing beers, and getting married to each other. The conflict came after 1990. At Gikongoro, before the war, Tutsi and Hutu had good relations. (Young Tutsi who had been released from prison, via Ingando, after confessing his participation in the genocide, Gikongoro, off Rd. to Cyangugu)

What is similar in these responses is the insistence that Hutu and Tutsi had always lived in harmony with the genocide constituting a sudden rupture. Another common feature of both the 'no memory' and the 'elite responsibility' narratives is the absence of responsibility and guilt. Instead, external parties, i.e. the pre-genocide government and elites, are blamed for causing divisions and unleashing violence. This strategy of scapegoating renders ordinary Rwandans collectively innocent. Consequently, for many local Hutu interviewees, all Rwandans were victims: while Tutsi and moderate Hutu were victims of violence and killings the mainly Hutu perpetrators were victims of manipulation and misuse, if not also violence. This explanation corresponds to the current government discourse which locates the cause of the genocide in divisive top-down politics,⁵² and which seems to be accepted by both Hutu and Tutsi. And yet, if one reads accounts of the genocide killings, it is apparent that popular participation in the genocide was not always due to coercion, but also due to personal motivation.⁵³ Furthermore, without wanting to underestimate the pervasive power of the genocide dynamics, individual cases suggest that at least some people were able to say 'no', or to buy themselves out of having to kill.⁵⁴

3.3.1 Chosen Amnesia

At first sight, there appears to be a paradox between what is remembered and what is 'forgotten'. While the event of the genocide was constantly evoked by my interviewees the

52 Interview with Fatuma Ndagiza, Executive Secretary of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, Kigali, 1.12.03. For a detailed discussion of collective vs. individual guilt see Eltringham 2004, ch. 4.

53 See for instance Hatzfeld 2003.

54 See for instance African Rights 2002.

causes of the genocide and the decades of tensions between Hutu and Tutsi were ignored. Despite earlier massacres of Tutsi in 1959, 1962 and 1973 the past was portrayed as harmonious with the 1994 genocide being a sudden break that took everybody by surprise. Aspects of the past seem to be eclipsed from the discourse, creating a form of amnesia, albeit selective, or what can be called chosen amnesia.

Chosen amnesia refers to two aspects: first, the term amnesia is used as an analogy for eclipsing the past or for not wanting to remember. Significantly, amnesia does not refer to a fading of memory or a different interpretation of the past, but to not wanting to draw on a particular recollection which is nevertheless still stored in the mind. Second, therefore, chosen suggests a degree of agency, i.e. a conscious selection process by an individual or a community to eclipse sections of the past. Chosen amnesia thus signifies the deliberate choice to not remember some aspects of the past.

As discussed before, while one of the functions of chosen trauma is to encourage group cohesion and a collective identity, chosen amnesia has the opposite effect. Through eclipsing memory the collective experience of an event is neglected, preventing the interpretation of a shared, group-specific past and the production of a 'we-feeling'. Chosen amnesia does not introduce a sense of closure, nor is it productive of a bounded identity, but rather permits a more flexible inclusion and exclusion into collective identities. This might be necessary when survivors and perpetrators live together in one community. Given the constraints and compromises of rural life, peasants particularly often prefer not to address conflicts publicly in order not to destroy the delicate social balance. In Rwanda, it might even take two or three generations before the situation permits speaking out.⁵⁵

We have to be courageous. Living in the community, we cannot live alone. A survivor cannot live alone. For example, we live with a family which killed our relatives. We have to relax and remain confident, and pretend that there is peace. (Woman of mixed parentage married to Tutsi who lost all her and most of his family, Karaba Umudugudu, Gikongoro)

Just after the war there were many problems. People returned from exile, there were also revenge killings. People could not talk to each other. Everybody was afraid of everybody. Today, it is as if we have forgotten everything. At the moment it does not exist anymore. People never talk about the past because it brings back bad memories and problems. We pretend it does not exist. (Elderly man who had just been released from prison, Nyamata)

In essence, chosen amnesia prevents many local Rwandans from dealing with the divisions which mark Rwandan society. This prevents a sense of closure and fixed boundary drawing between 'us' and 'them'. Through not referring to the underlying social cleavages they reduce their impact and subvert their dividing powers. This marks a deferral and deliberate leaving open of bounded communities, in this case Hutu or Tutsi, which is essential for day-to-day survival and peaceful coexistence.

Moreover, eclipsing past divisions protects by-standers and participants from acknowledging guilt and at least partial responsibility for the genocide. Through blaming another agent external to the community, i.e. former politicians and elites, all community members are relieved of responsibility. This process of scapegoating permits that everybody feels victim-

⁵⁵ Ntampaka 2002, p. 17.

ised and creates at least some sense of collective identity under the guise of victimhood. The danger of chosen amnesia, however, is that it leaves social antagonisms untouched and obstructs the transformation of the conflict. As argued by many Rwandans with whom I discussed the peacebuilding process, the lack of transformation is potentially dangerous since it leaves the society susceptible to future manipulation.

3.4 The Transitional Justice Discourse

Since the genocide has been a prime example of popular participation in violence the study assessed how Rwanda comes to terms with these crimes. Dealing with the past of a violent conflict or abusive regime is often referred to as transitional justice, i.e. the transformation from a violent to a non-violent social and political structure.⁵⁶ Despite its relative novelty, the concept of transitional justice is rapidly gaining prominence as a form of intervention in processes of post-conflict transition and can therefore be classified as a peacebuilding tool. While some scholars prefer a limited, exclusively punitive and retributive understanding of the term, it is generally used more widely to incorporate compensatory, distributive and restorative justice.⁵⁷ By and large, the aim of transitional justice is to uncover the truth of human rights crimes, to publicly acknowledge the suffering of victims, to identify and punish the responsible individuals and groups, to establish the rule of law, and to contribute to reconciliation.⁵⁸ Importantly, the manner in which a transitional justice discourse is led can have significant repercussions on the transformation of a conflict. The study therefore explored the character of the Rwandan discourse and whether it had an effect on the relationship between the parties to the conflict.

Given the magnitude of the crimes, dealing with the past is a crucial issue for Rwanda. Shortly after the genocide, prisons were spilling over with about 120,000 people accused of participating in the genocide, some of whom were innocent, and within the first years about 11,000 inmates died due to appalling prison conditions. Institutionally, much of the pre-genocide legal apparatus had been destroyed, lawyers had been killed or had fled into exile, or they had been involved in the genocide. Between the beginning of genocide trials in the classical jurisdictions in 1996 and the launch of *Gacaca* in 2002, only 7,000 accused were tried and it was estimated that the legal prosecution of all detainees would take at least 100 years. Faced with these challenges, the Rwandan government decided to introduce a modification of the traditional village tribunals called *Gacaca* to deal with the enormous task.

3.4.1 *Gacaca* Tribunals

The Kinyarwandan word *Gacaca* translates 'law' or 'grass' and refers to the holding of informal community tribunals to resolve conflicts.⁵⁹ Before colonialism *Gacaca* was the main justice system; they dealt with disputes about land, pastoral conflicts, household and family

⁵⁶ For a discussion of the conceptual underpinnings see Buckley-Zistel 2007c, Buckley-Zistel/Moltmann 2006.

⁵⁷ Crocker 1998.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 496.

⁵⁹ The following is based on Buckley-Zistel 2005a.

quarrels, and badly honoured contracts, and had a particular focus on reconciliation and community-building.

In order to prosecute genocide offenders, today's *Gacaca* have changed significantly from the original version since they are much more regulated, operate on a national scale and are no longer voluntary. Given their punitive sanctions they bear strong characteristics of formal justice systems.⁶⁰ Even though community-building and reconciliation remain key objectives, it is anticipated that this will be a result of truth-telling and rendering justice. The jurisdictions are thus hybrids between a traditional, informal system with restorative potential and a retributive, official justice apparatus. Their objectives are to give people the means to solve their own problems, to speed up genocide trials, to establish the truth about the genocide, to render justice, to put an end to the culture of impunity and to reconcile the people of Rwanda.⁶¹

The weekly *Gacaca* sessions consist of a General Assembly comprised of local residents (who are predominately Hutu), elected judges and the accused. In the weekly sessions, everybody is free to speak, the accused defend themselves and there is no need for physical evidence, but testimonies are sufficient. Sentences can range from community work to life imprisonment. According to the 1996 Organic Law genocide crimes in Rwanda are classified in three categories of offenders:⁶² category 1 includes the planners and persons of authority who orchestrated the crimes, as well as offenders of sexual violence, category 2 includes murderers and co-murderers, i.e. the vast group of followers, while category 3 incorporates minor crimes such as theft and looting. While offenders of category 2 and 3 are tried by *Gacaca*, category 1 offenders are subjected to classical jurisdiction. The *Gacaca* process is however not entirely independent of the justice apparatus since many accused appear at the hearings with a case file compiled by the Department of Public Prosecution.

To advance the objectives of *Gacaca*, the Rwandan government has introduced the possibility of confession for all but category 1 offenders. Since confessing the participation in the genocide reduces the sentences significantly it is a very attractive incentive for most *génocidaires*. Each confession must include all information about the crime, the incrimination of co-conspirators and an apology. The confessions potentially add a restorative element to *Gacaca* since they encourage apology and forgiveness and aim at the reintegration of perpetrators.

Given the novelty of the new, modified *Gacaca*, the government decided to first implement pilot projects. These pilot tribunals, launched in June 2002, constituted about 10% of all *Gacaca* and with some delay a total of 12,000 jurisdictions commenced their work on March 2005. Contrary to the objective, the tribunals are operating much slower than anticipated and, instead of reducing the number of accused, emptying prisons and releasing the innocent, the confessions have led to a dramatic increase in new accusations. According to current estimates based on the pilot trials, the number of category 1 offences to be dealt with by classical jurisdictions will be approximately 50,000.⁶³ Moreover, the total number of accused will be between 500,000 and 600,000, out of which about 400,000 will be in category 2. Rather than speeding up genocide trials, they increase the number of accused, leading to a prolongation of the justice process.

60 Karekezi et al. 2004, p. 74.

61 Government of the Republic of Rwanda 2004.

62 Initially, the law differentiated four categories but was amended in 2004.

63 Magsam 2004, p. 9.

3.4.2 Truth, Justice and Reconciliation



Gacaca poster 'The Truth Heals', Kigali (2004)

Inkiko Gacaca, 'the truth heals', says the caption of the nation-wide *Gacaca* promotion campaign. For the Government of Rwanda, the rationale underlying *Gacaca* is that truth leads to justice, and justice leads to reconciliation. Social healing is advanced through uncovering past wrongs, introducing closure and moving on to a consolidated peace. It thus seeks to promote a discourse according to which - as the slogan of the country-wide campaign advertises - truth heals and retributive and restorative justice meet. But does truth really heal in Rwanda?

At this stage, an answer can merely be hypothetical since the pilot *Gacaca* have only just reached their verdict phase while all other tribunals were only launched recently. Nevertheless, some tenets are already visible and wider arguments about the link between truth, justice and reconciliation can be made.

According to surveys, the general acceptance - and thus participation and ownership - of *Gacaca* seems positive.⁶⁴ However, in interviews with official *Gacaca* monitors we learned that the actual attendance and participation in the weekly sessions is low, suggesting that trust and hope in the process is limited. This can also be explained by the fact that the mainly Hutu General Assembly prosecutes mainly Hutu *génocidaires*, i.e. relatives or friends, who they do not want to charge. Participation and ownership are also undermined by the fact that many Rwandans seem to be less interested in addressing the legacy of the genocide than in remaining silent. For instance, during *Gacaca* hearings - with the exemption of confessing prisoners - the involvement of the population in providing testimonies or general information has been rated as poor.⁶⁵ Testimonies are mainly given by Tutsi survivors while a 'conspiracy of silence' hangs over the Hutu relatives and neighbours of the

⁶⁴ See for instance Gasibirege/Babalola 2001.

⁶⁵ Karekezi et al. 2004, p. 79.

accused.⁶⁶ Crucially, this lack of participation and ownership undermines one of the key aims of the tribunals, which is to give people the means to solve their own problems.

Besides, the government's objective to establish truth as a prerequisite for healing seems too optimistic. It becomes increasingly apparent that most detainees only make partial confessions or only confess minor crimes, and frequently only accuse accomplices that are either dead or hiding abroad. Moreover inmates often appear to have organised themselves over the time of their detention to present consistent testimonies which spare other prisoners and relations.⁶⁷ In the Hutu-dominated General Assembly witnesses often stay silent due to social pressure and because discussing such issues openly runs counter to Rwandan culture.⁶⁸

Truth is also a casualty of fear, intimidation and corruption. For instance, in Kaduha, Gikongoro district, in 2003 three Tutsi survivors, who had intended to testify in *Gacaca*, were assassinated. According to the survivors' organisation IBUKA, these are not isolated cases.⁶⁹ Fear does however not only silence survivors, but also the population more widely. In some areas local interviewees reported that perpetrators stick notes to trees warning community members of the repercussions of testifying. Corruption and bribery of judges, witnesses and survivors are additional factors with a severe truth-distorting impact.

The government's discourse is further based on rendering justice. However, many Rwandans criticise the one-sided approach of *Gacaca* justice since the jurisdictions exclusively try crimes related to genocide - all other massacres and war crimes are excluded. This is particularly relevant regarding the war crimes committed by the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) during its insurgency war from 1990-94 and after it brought the genocide to a halt. The death-toll of mainly Hutu is estimated at 25,000-45,000.⁷⁰ Many of our Hutu interviewees expressed anger and frustration about this omission and *Gacaca* are often interpreted as 'victor's justice' for those who won the insurgency. Without wanting to suggest that there was a 'double genocide', it denies that Hutu were also victims of the war.

Moreover, criminal and legal aspects of transitional justice are not the only concern for many Rwandans, but so is political and economic justice. Political justice would require a framework of governance in which everybody has the same rights, regardless of their ethnic group identity. Whether this is the case in Rwanda today was questioned by many of our interviewees. Although Rwanda recently held presidential and parliamentary elections, as shall be discussed below, their outcome has been contested and some academics go as far as calling the Kagame government a dictatorship in which power is held by a small group of Tutsi-RPF members.⁷¹ Power, it appears, is thus still in the hands of one ethnic group, leading to the perception of exclusion amongst Hutu, which is potentially a destabilising factor. From the perspective of economic justice, in a country where 60 per cent of the population lives under the poverty line, the equal distribution of resources is of paramount importance for many Rwandans. At present, the gap between rich and poor is widening. Allegedly, many of the *nouveaux riches* in the capital are Tutsi related to the RPF, which perpetuates Hutu resentment against the government. Since the improvement of one's economic situation was a relevant consideration during the genocide, material wealth remains a destabilising factor.

Lastly, the government had hoped that the plea bargaining and confession element of *Gacaca* would not only elicit truth, but also contribute to its objective of promoting recon-

66 Molenaar 2004, p. 83.

67 PRI 2002, p. 26.

68 Mironko/Uvin 2003, p. 227.

69 Interview Benoit Kaboyi, IBUKA, Kigali, 20.4.2004. See also HRW 2007.

70 de Forge 1999, p. 728.

71 Reyntjens 2004.

ciliation. However, in Rwandan culture, confessing in front of a victim is a personal insult and creates antagonisms.⁷² The attitude of prisoners is moreover often marked by arrogance and a show of strength rather than genuine remorse. Detainees experience strong pressure by the authorities to confess and to ask for pardon, which casts a shady light on the sincerity of the apologies.⁷³ Many survivors are shocked by the attitude of individual detainees who argue that the state (and for some also God) has forgiven them and thus demand that the survivors do so as well.⁷⁴ In other incidences, even though detainees have a positive attitude towards confessing they refuse to accept responsibility for their crimes ('we are innocent, so why confess') or come up with excuses or mitigating factors.⁷⁵

Despite the government's discourse according to which the truth brought about in *Gacaca* heals, it appears that the process of revealing the truth - i.e. the 'right' memory of the past - often worsens the situation since it has brought the whole complexity of the legacy of the killings and the circumstances of today's coexistence of victims, perpetrators and their relations to the fore. This is not simply a result of their punitive capacity, but mainly due to remembering the horrific past, albeit in many different ways. Even if not articulated in testimonies, *Gacaca* have returned the genocide to the communities. Where relationships between the groups were slowly improving and antagonistic identities changing, *Gacaca* lead to their renewed deterioration and division.

As for their potential to contribute to conflict transformation, based on the experience of *Gacaca* so far the results of our fieldwork are rather sobering. The idea behind the rationale of truth leading to justice, and justice leading to reconciliation is to introduce a sense of closure on the (violent) past in order to move individuals and the society forwards to a peaceful future. This strategy has so far not been successful, though. As illustrated above, the tribunals lack ownership and participation which undermines the social, interactive aspect of truth. Moreover, the causal chain depends on whose truth, and what justice, is established, and how. Despite much initial hope it now transpires that *Gacaca* cause at least as many problems as it can potentially solve, leading to a degree of disillusion.⁷⁶

3.5 The Role of the International Development Community in Peacebuilding in Rwanda

In addition to analysing internal peacebuilding discourses, the research project examined the role of the international development community in this process.⁷⁷ The nexus between security, conflict and development has become a commonplace and it is now widely accepted that development assistance is not a neutral, technocratic operation, but always a political intervention. This can have devastating consequences, such as in Rwanda before the genocide. Initially, in the 1980s, the country was considered a 'good performer', i.e. a stable environment with a development-minded government, which earned the appreciation and support of many donors.⁷⁸ Yet, as illustrated by Peter Uvin, despite good inten-

72 PRI 2003, p. 3-4.

73 PRI 2004, p. 57.

74 Ibid., p. 58.

75 PRI 2002, p. 28.

76 See also Ad hoc Parliament Commission on Genocide Ideology 2004.

77 For a more extensive discussion of this aspect see Buckley-Zistel 2007a. The analysis is based on project reports and mission statements of international organisations as well as on participation in workshop, seminars and lobbying work.

78 Piron/McKay 2004, p. 7.

tions, international development assistance had a profoundly negative impact on social and political structures since it reinforced the already very strong government, which then used its powerful position to mobilise for the genocide in the early 1990s.⁷⁹ External aid also widened the gap between rich and poor, laying the foundation for severe discontent, and its top-down nature - often executed by Rwandan government officials - damaged the self-respect of local people, making it easier for political elites to organise popular support for the genocide in the early 1990s.⁸⁰



Fieldwork in Nyamata (2004)

This section discusses the efforts of the international development community to undo its mistakes of 'aiding violence' and to contribute to 'aiding peace'. Given its acknowledgment of past failures, there is a strong interest in contributing to the peacebuilding process.

3.5.1 History of International Donors' Presence

The relationship between the Government of Rwanda and the international development community has not always been easy, in particular against the backdrop of the failure of the international community to stop the genocide. In the early years, the government was severely irritated if donors channelled their funds to institutions other than itself, leading to the termination of the work of 38 international organisations in 1995. Today, even though resentment has ebbed mistrust remains and every time there is an international audience -

79 Uvin 1998.

80 Ibid., p. 143.

such as during the national genocide commemorations in April - the President, in particular, uses the occasion to attack the international community. Cynically, it has been suggested that the government is using the 'genocide factor' to blackmail members of the international community into turning a blind eye to its authoritarian domestic and aggressive regional politics.⁸¹

The international development community in Rwanda is far from being a harmonious body, though. Rather, the individual donors differ in a number of key aspects including their attitude towards the government as well as their strategies to influence it. Regarding their attitudes, donors can be divided into those who are critical and those who are largely uncritical of its actions.⁸² The former, such as France and Belgium, mainly coincide with countries that had a considerable presence before the genocide where they cooperated with the Habyarimana regime, while the latter group is mainly composed of countries which had little involvement before 1994, but which now see it as their moral responsibility to compensate for their failure to stop the genocide. This group includes the 'Anglophone' donors UK and USA, as well as Sweden and the Netherlands. Germany, Switzerland and Canada maintained their level of support after the genocide, with only Canada striking the occasional critical cord.⁸³ The reluctance of individual donors to criticise the Government is reflected in the frequent remark by Rwandan officials during interviews that they like Germans since they never ask any questions.

Regarding the discussion about what model of liberal democracy is appropriate for Rwanda today, the development community can broadly be divided into three groups.⁸⁴ The more critical donors France and Belgium argue that the Rwandan ethnic majority should equal the democratic majority. This would assert much power to Hutu while rendering the pro-Tutsi, RPF-dominated government illegitimate. Others, including some international human rights associations, promote a competitive democracy model such as applied in Western countries, while the third group, which includes countries such as the UK and Sweden, stress the sensitivity of the post-genocide context, leading to the promotion of a concordance democracy model.

In order to have some influence on the government, two patterns of political dialogue between government and donors can be identified.⁸⁵ The first can be labelled 'constructive management' and is based on Memoranda of Understanding on which both parties have agreed. For instance, the UK, Netherlands and Sweden have signed Memoranda of Understanding with the government which include the following benchmarks: national unity and reconciliation, conflict resolution, good governance, poverty reduction, sustainable macro economic stability and human resources development.⁸⁶ The second pattern of political dialogue is based on conditioning donor assistance to political opening through unilaterally determined benchmarks. While the first pattern has a strong focus on collaboration with the government and state actors, the second also involves working with civil society actors.

Despite their differences in assessing the political situation of Rwanda, all donors have made a considerable effort to promote the liberal peace agenda through supporting governance projects and institution-building; there has been a dramatic increase in donors' willingness to intervene in those fashionable areas of social and political engineering.⁸⁷

81 Reyntjens 2004.

82 Barré et al. 1999, p. 36, Piron/McKay 2004, p. 26.

83 Barré et al. 1999.

84 Kayumba et al. 2004, p. 101.

85 Ibid., p. 102.

86 ICCO et al. 2002, p. 6.

87 Unsworth/Uvin 2002, p. 7.

Some analysts argue that their commitment in the field is unprecedented.⁸⁸ Nonetheless, in recognition of the nexus between poverty and conflict, they have also continued their more traditional work on poverty reduction, in particular through the government's PRSP process.⁸⁹ Yet since the governance sector has been so central to donor funding the research project assessed their efforts more closely.

3.5.2 Governance and Institution-building

Before the genocide, Rwanda had no democratic institutions to manage its ethnic differences. In the 1980 under Habyarimana, the state system was based on a quota regulation according to which Tutsi participation in the public realm was limited to their assumed proportion in the society. After the RPF-invasion in 1990 and the ensuing civil war, national and international demands to democratise the country grew rapidly and, faced with the potential loss of power due to the advancing RPF, international demands and internal competition led the Habyarimana Hutu-government to start a hate campaign against all Tutsi, which was enforced by an increasingly liberalised press and its extreme hate speech. It used its state institutions to mobilise the Hutu population to exterminate all Tutsi. After the victory of the RPF, which ended the genocide, a Government of National Unity and a Transitional National Assembly were established which prioritise rebuilding the state structures and institutions which were first misused and then destroyed in the genocide.

For donors to Rwanda, too, strengthening the capacity of the state has been a priority. Two aspects testify for this tendency: the importance they ascribe to budget support and the importance they ascribe to funding the governance sector. The Rwandan government receives approximately USD 300 million in overseas development assistance (ODA) per year which accounts for about 60% of its public spending.⁹⁰ About half of the assistance is provided through budget support and the other half through projects using parallel delivery mechanisms and donor procedures. The budget support donors World Bank (WB), European Commission (EC), African Development Bank (AfDB), Sweden (Sida) and UK (DFID) finance the government directly through pledging large parts of their funds to its budget. At least 50% of their aid portfolio is donated to programmes led by the government, in individual cases such as DFID up to 2/3 of the funds go directly to the government while Sida only works through budget support.⁹¹ Most other donors have aligned their projects and programmes with government policies, in particular its Vision 2020, the PRSP and specific Sector Plans.⁹²

The following table provides an overview of the funding priorities of the ten main donors to the country, indicating the extent of budget support and the importance donors ascribe to supporting the government.⁹³

88 Barré et al. 1999, p. 15.

89 PRSP stands for Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. Individual organisations, such as OXFAM and the European Commission, are trying to have an impact on peace and reconciliation through development projects.

90 World Bank 2006.

91 Interview with programme officer at SIDA, Kigali, 22.1.04. Some donors such as USAID and Japan have domestic procedures which do not allow them to participate in joined funding arrangements.

92 Ahobamuteze et al. 2006, p. 7. Republic of Rwanda 2000. Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands have explicit national guidelines requiring alignment.

93 World Bank 2006. Since November 2006, French assistance to Rwanda has been threatened by a diplomatic clash between the two countries after a French judge sought to arrest members of the current Kigali regime, claiming their actions had provoked the genocide in 1994.

The following table provides an overview of the funding priorities of the ten main donors to the country, indicating the extent of budget support and the importance donors ascribe to supporting the government.⁹³

Top 10 donors	Sector	Amount (US\$m)
World Bank	Budget support, rural development, energy, human resource development	63
United States	Private sector development, health	49
European Commission	Budget support, road infrastructure, rural development	48
United Kingdom	Budget support, governance, education	48
Netherlands	Governance, demobilization and reintegration	21
Belgium	Health	21
Sweden	Budget support	14
Germany	Governance	12
AfDB	Budget support, infrastructure and education	11
France	Culture	10
Total		297

Funding priorities of major donors

⁹³ World Bank 2006. Since November 2006, French assistance to Rwanda has been threatened by a diplomatic clash between the two countries after a French judge sought to arrest members of the current Kigali regime, claiming their actions had provoked the genocide in 1994.

In its report on ODA to Rwanda, the government separates the pledged funds into four general sectors: the governance sector (GS) receives 47% of all donations, the production and environment sector 10% (PES), the infrastructure sector 13% (IS) and the social and human development sector 30% (DS). The four sectors can be broken down into sub-sectors which receive the following portions of aid:⁹⁴

Sector	Sub-Sector	% of ODA
GS	General public administration (incl. government, parliament, finance, foreign relations, employment, statistics, debt)	40
DS	Education	11
DS	Social Protection (incl. social assistance, gender, vulnerable groups)	10
DS	Health	8
PES	Agriculture	7,5
IS	Land, housing and infrastructure	7,5
GS	Justice, order and security (incl. police, security, justice, <i>Gacaca</i> , public order)	7
IS	Transport and Communication	3
PES	Industry and Commerce	2
IS	Water and Sanitation	2
DS	Youth, Culture and Sport	1
IS	Energy	0.5
PES	Environmental Protection	0,5

Development assistance according to sectors

The table shows what dominant role the governance sector takes.⁹⁵ Almost half of the ODA goes to the establishment and support of governance institutions - executive, legislative and judicative - which is a considerable portion and which strengthens the state significantly.

94 The Table is based on figures provided by République du Rwanda/Ministère des Finances et de la Planification Economique 2004, p. 7.

95 It must be kept in mind, though, that the year under review was an election year in Rwanda where donors placed a particular focus on funding democratic institutions and processes. Since this data on ODA is the only one available alternative years cannot be considered for comparison. However, the general thrust of the findings, i.e. the strong emphasis of donors' aid on funding the government and state structures, correspond with the World Bank table which reveals how strong the emphasis of individual donors on budget fund or the support for government institutions is.

In addition to budget funding and programme alignment, a considerable amount of donor projects are situated within government structures. This is generally the case for UNDP, but also, by its very nature of providing technical assistance, the German GTZ. Yet also explicitly non-governmental projects work within government structures. For instance, most of the projects of the German Civil Peace Service work in and with government institutions ranging from the Human Rights Commission over national youth clubs to street children projects.⁹⁶

3.5.3 Democratisation in Rwanda

After illustrating the strong focus of ODA on supporting democratic government institutions it is necessary to ask to what avail? Has their work become more transparent and democratic? Regarding transparency, Rwandan politics is affected by internal discord of which not much transpires out of the inner circles and important changes in personnel, for instance the demission of the Prime Minister and the President in 2000, have been taken swiftly without public debate.⁹⁷ This suggests that at least up to the 2003 elections crucial decisions were taken without consulting the interim parliament. Furthermore, the government has embarked on a large amount of reforms demonstrating a strong degree of top-down state authority on the one hand and of participatory and consultative methods on the other.⁹⁸ Some analysts argue, however, that these consultative processes are largely *pro forma* and that there is no guarantee that the views of the population, if at all articulated, are included in documents and legislation.⁹⁹

As for democratisation, the RPF has kept a strong grip on state institutions while the Rwandan parliament has remained weak.¹⁰⁰ This includes restrictions in political and civil liberties, making it difficult for alternative political perspectives to emerge and to gain a platform. In 2003, Rwanda's post-genocide transition period officially ended with holding democratic presidential and parliament elections, as well as a referendum about the constitution. Given the RPF's pre-eminent position on Rwanda's political landscape, its material advantages and the lack of freedom of speech which disadvantaged its opponents, Kagame's and the RPF's victory were hardly surprising.¹⁰¹ Kagame was confirmed with over 95% as the President of the Republic and the RPF moved into parliament with 73% of all votes. Even though the EU election monitors contested that the processes were free and fair it can be assumed that Kagame would have anyway emerged as the clear victor since he stands as a guarantor for domestic security and stability, aspects which rank high on the list of Rwandan priorities.¹⁰² This pragmatic choice is however less an indication of a broad legitimacy amongst the population, but rather a sign of concern about future violence. Some Rwandans see the dominance of the RPF as a continuation of Tutsi supremacy and occupation and it has been suggested that inter-ethnic relationships worsened due to the elections.¹⁰³

96 This is partly the case because it is very difficult to work outside of the reach of the government which keeps a tight control on civil society activities.

97 Hofmeier 2003, p. 10.

98 Piron/McKay 2004, p. 19.

99 ICCO et al. 2002, p. 22.

100 International Crisis Group 2002.

101 Hofmeier 2003.

102 European Union 2004, Hofmeier 2003, p. 16.

103 This is the impression gained in the course of your numerous interviews. Longman et al. 2004 come to a similar conclusion.

In the course of the election campaigns the largest opposition party *Mouvement Démocratique Rwandais* (MRD) was accused of divisionism and subsequently banned. Significantly, even the party's own parliamentary delegation voted for the ban, indicating the pervasive influence of the RPF on political developments.¹⁰⁴ The new Rwandan constitution stipulates that the cabinet must consist of representatives from different parties and that the president, prime minister and the president of the lower house must not all belong to the same party. However, the constitution gives much power to the president who is solely authorised to appoint the prime minister and who can dissolve the parliament. Even though political parties can be formed, this has to take place under certain conditions: they must not be identified with the genocide and cannot be based on ethnicity or religion. In the past this has led to serious opposition to the formation of new parties, such as of the ex-President Pasteur Bizimungu, who has subsequently been sentenced to prison.¹⁰⁵ The constitution provides for a 'Forum of Parties' which allegedly serves to enhance the communication between the parties, yet it can easily be used to control their activities, turning parties into proxies of the RPF. Due to the constitution's emphasis on Rwanda's unity, political campaigning can be easily restricted - as it is anyway at the grassroots level - limiting pluralism, diversity and opposition.

On a general level, despite elections and a new constitution there has been a decline in social and political rights essential for a functioning democracy. Freedom of press is severely restricted and subject to censorship and self-censorship. Newspapers such as the independent *Umuseso*, *Umuwigizi* and *Umuco* have been harassed and prosecuted and their staff has been intimidated and threatened.¹⁰⁶ In the absence of critical voices, news reporting remains strongly pro-government. In a similar vein, the work of civil society institutions has been seriously undermined. The report on divisionism published by the parliament in 2004 singled out five national NGOs and several religious groups and recommended their banning.¹⁰⁷ A number of international NGOs were also targeted. After wide, in particular international, protest the organisations were not instantly banned, but referred to court for legal prosecution. Not surprisingly, this led to a drastic reduction of their criticism of the government and the RPF.

Looking at these aspects it can be argued that the development of the political process is very much controlled by the RPF-dominated government and its institutions, limiting its democratic value. Central to the efforts of the RPF to control Rwanda's political landscape is the fear of losing power on the one hand as well as to maintain national security and stability on the other. Even though the latter aspect is comprehensible, the government's strategy is counterproductive, if not to say risky. The suppression of large parts of the population due to security concerns is a serious obstacle for the development of trust and hence for the government's broader legitimacy.¹⁰⁸ For the international development community this implies that a continuation of the support of state institutions and structures, in particular its strong focus of supporting the government, potentially runs counter its objective of contributing to peacebuilding. It has thus been argued, that they cannot ensure that the institutions they support act in the way they expect of desire.¹⁰⁹ For institutions are not neutral and apolitical structures, but always reflect the intentions and motivations of those who put them to use. While, in Rwanda, state systems, government institutions and the administration function increasingly more efficiently they remain under the political influ-

104 Hofmeier 2003.

105 Bizimungu was charged with inciting civil disobedience, creating a criminal organisation, and embezzling funds. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison, despite questions about the fairness of the trial by international human rights organisations.

106 Amnesty International 2007.

107 Ad hoc Parliament Commission on Genocide Ideology 2004.

108 See also Hofmeier 2003, p. 26.

109 Uvin 2001b, p. 186.

ence of the RPF, continuing a long tradition of coercive state power.¹¹⁰ Due to the donors' institution-building strategy, much of the ODA and its power ends up in the hands of government officials and structures. Since one of the causes of the genocide was that external development led to a strong state it is surprising to see that not much has changed, despite explicit 'wake-up' calls.¹¹¹

Hence, even though the impact of the international development community on the establishment of rule of law and governance institutions has been significant, serious problems remain regarding civil and political rights. This can be explained through the donor's liberal peace discourse discussed above, which privileges building government institutions capable of implementing the new liberal values, leading to a state-centred perspective of peacebuilding according to which sustainable peace requires first and foremost functioning liberal and democratic institutions.¹¹² This significantly limits the role of civil, and potentially oppositional, actors; state actors determine the input and role of civil actors, which resembles a 'victor's peace' in which the victor, that is the post-conflict government, determines the agenda of non-state actors.¹¹³

The importance ascribed to governance institutions reveals a specific understanding of the nature of violent conflicts, which underlies the liberal peace approach. Institutions have the purpose of negotiating conflicts over interests and incompatible goals. Equal participation, transparency and the rule of law guarantee that competing interests are managed in a fair and just way so that none of the parties to the conflict feels its rights to be infringed. This implies that individuals and groups are rational actors who calculate costs and benefits, an understanding of human agency which is deeply rooted in Western culture, yet not necessarily in others.¹¹⁴ What is overlooked, though, is that conflicts are not merely fought over interest, but also identity aspects. As argued above, disputes operate at the levels of the more or less openly negotiated political demands and interests as well as at the level of collective experiences and attitudes central to the formation of an identity.¹¹⁵ What the donors' approach ignores, and what the Rwandan example reveals, is that a country does not only consist of state structures, but also of its people. While the existence of state structures is important for addressing conflicts over interests, conflict over identities remain largely untouched - and these are of particular relevance in the case of Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda. As explained above, they became meaningful during colonialism and were subsequently politicised and instrumentalised by ensuing regimes. Even though the divide became less severe in the period prior to the invasion of the RPF in 1990, today after the experience of mass violence and massacres it is more significant than ever. And so do the dichotomies between Hutu/Tutsi, us/them, friend/enemy still determine how events are interpreted. A social transformation, which challenges these dichotomies, has so far not taken place and lies in distant future. It is thus not surprising that the election victory of the RPF is interpreted as a continuation of Tutsi supremacy, that wealth is equated with government proximity and the *Gacaca* tribunals are seen as victor's justice. This, however, escapes the attention of many international donors.

In conclusion, even though it is on top of the donors' agenda to contribute to peacebuilding and conflict transformation in Rwanda so far there has only been moderate success. This is mainly due to the fact that they consider post-conflict reconstruction, such as building institutions, to be a-political and neutral, without realising the power dynamics that work in

110 So far, none of the country's governments or elites were prepared to share power and this has never been met with much resistance from the society. Hofmeier 2003, p. 11.

111 Uvin 2003.

112 See also Mehler 2003, p. 10.

113 Richmond 2005, p. 128.

114 See also Rotte 2000, p. 41.

115 Ropers 1997, p. 8.

the background which determine the work of these efforts and how they are perceived by the society. Instead of contributing to change, they assist in establishing the power hierarchies that existed prior to the genocide - even though the role of Hutu and Tutsi is now reversed - reproducing the conditions which led to the massacres. To finish this section with a quote by Peter Uvin: 'We owe it to Rwandans to do better than we did before, and I am afraid we are currently failing.'¹¹⁶



Genocide Memorial in Ntarama, Nyamata (2003)

116 Uvin 2003b, 5.

4 Conclusions

The research project 'Between Past and Future' examined the extent to which various peacebuilding discourses reduce or reproduce the antagonistic relationship between the parties to the Rwandan conflict and whether they lead to its transformation. This was done through applying a framework of analysis based on the notion of hermeneutics. Even though the study set out to analyse how enmity is 'un-constructed' in discourse and language, in the course of the fieldwork it soon transpired that there has been little progress in this regard, leading to an examination as to why this is the case. Without wanting to repeat the findings of the study in detail this conclusion returns to the conceptual aspect of the research project through discussing the relevance of each of the four categories - change in identity, memory, power, closure - for understanding the impact of various peacebuilding discourses on conflict transformation in Rwanda.

By way of introduction I suggested that to overcome a conflict, the parties need to change aspects of their identity so that they no longer define themselves in delineation of the other group and the study asked, if and how this is happening in Rwanda today. The findings are rather sobering. Despite explicit efforts, for instance by the government, the country remains deeply divided. Collective identities are produced and reproduced through the choosing of trauma or amnesia, i.e. through establishing clear demarcations between 'us' and 'them' or through leaving them deliberately unaddressed. Belonging to a particular group determines attitudes towards issues such as how to commemorate the genocide, who constitutes victims and perpetrators, whether or not to participate in *Gacaca* and how to interpret the politics of the Rwandan government.

This is closely intertwined with the second aspect identified in the hermeneutic framework: remembering. In Rwanda, the memory of the past - for instance in form of the commemorations, but also in informal ways of choosing trauma or forgetting or in struggles to bring to light the truth about the genocide during *Gacaca* tribunals - is dividing rather than uniting. The particular recollections of the past have a profound impact on the future for they stand in the way of addressing the lingering tensions, leaving them susceptible to manipulation and incitement by political entrepreneurs.

The third aspect of the hermeneutic framework is to analyse how political, economic and social power hierarchies determine the transformation process. In this study, the role of the government has been especially highlighted, even though it is not the only powerful actor in the society, as became evident in the discussion of the *Gacaca* tribunals. Still, its authoritarian politics both in day-to-day matters in general and in the national reconciliation process in particular have a negative impact on the transformation of the conflict since it provokes antagonism and resentment amongst large parts of the population. On a more subtle level, the government controls what is subject to public debate and what is excluded, which has a significant impact on how the genocide will be remembered and narrated in the future.



Memorial in Cyangugu (2004)

This leads to the fourth aspect of the framework of analysis. Above I suggested that, in order to contribute to the transformation of a conflict, discourses promoted by peacebuilding efforts should not introduce a sense of closure which eradicates differences. Trying to make all Rwandans the same, regardless of the particular features of their identity group, does not only deprive people of their identity and what they believe in, but it also undermines any possibility to discuss the conflict in a constructive manner in order to reach some agreement - if only about the legitimacy of group-specific perspectives and experiences.

In sum, at least regarding the peacebuilding discourses analysed by this research project, the study concludes that they, by-and-large, leave the antagonistic relationships between the identity groups Hutu and Tutsi unaddressed and thus have only a limited impact on the transformation of the conflict. By way of conclusion the question arises whether there are alternative paths for Rwanda to deal with its violent past. Needless to say, there cannot be an easy answer. It is however my contention that opening up the debate, both politically and socially, might be a first step to address the underlying tensions. This would entail not to focus on establishing the 'right' history of the country in order to determine who is victim and who perpetrator, but rather to assess why each individual group draws on a particular repertoire of memories and why it strives towards legitimating its identity group and position. An answer to this question might include accepting that guilt and responsibility are not always one-sided and that it does not run along ethnic lines. While realising that this lies in distant future, given the enormity of the crime, the challenge for Rwandans today is whether they approach this vision - or move further away.

It is here, too, where external actors have some responsibility. It is therefore necessary that the donors widen their scope from considering interest to identity aspects of conflicts. Democratic structures and institutions might be a necessity after violent conflicts but they require a demos that is willingly to accept and work within them. In Rwanda, the existence

of an identity-crossing demos still lies in the distant future and needs special consideration during planning and implementation of development projects.

This could, for instance, be done in the light of the *Gacaca* tribunals. While new resentment is not surprising during a truth seeking process, in order to reduce the negative consequences the communities require a safety-net to be able to deal with the renewed mistrust and friction. In order to turn at least some of the processes around, it might thus be helpful to complement *Gacaca* with trust and confidence-building measures and community or victim-offender mediation. While this might not resolve all dilemmas revealed by *Gacaca* it might nevertheless lessen its negative impact. Critically, to increase ownership confidence-building projects should not be on an institutionalised, national scale, but situated in the local communities. A small number of projects by Rwandans already exist and their expansion should be supported. This complementation of *Gacaca* justice could then lead to a more sustainable transformation of the conflict.

5 Transfer of Findings and Future Research

Much has been written about Rwanda and the country continues being in the focus of research and analysis. While much of the research concentrates on the genocide and its causes, studies about the conflict transformation process are still rare, with the exemption of the *Gacaca* tribunal. Between Past and Future's contribution to the field is that it analyses the impact of the various discourses of dealing with the past as well as the identity politics behind them. In particular its local focus in Gikongoro and Nyamata is unique and has provided important insights.

Areas of concern for future studies could be to continue analysing the *Gacaca* tribunals, the democratisation process and, of course, the conflict transformation process. This could also be linked to issues such as regional peace and security, security sector reform and the demobilisation of ex-combatants, as well as an assessment of conflicts over land rights, one of the most pressing issues in the impoverished country. A further area of research could be a comparison between the peacebuilding discourse in Rwanda and Burundi. The latter follows a different strategy involving an open dialogue between all parties as well as power-sharing between Hutu and Tutsi government officials.

Regarding the conceptional aspect of this study, the framework for analysing conflict transformation processes in divided societies has a much broader relevance than post-genocide Rwanda and can be transferred to other post-conflict societies. In this sense, this study marks a first step of establishing a new research agenda in peace and conflict studies and hopes to inspire similar projects.

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